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ABSTRACT

The Center for Academic Excellence of the College of Education at the University of Central Arkansas was created in 1984 to help improve education in Arkansas by cooperating with the state's public school districts and sharing the college's resources with them. The center's staff helps public school administrators assess local needs, devise plans for addressing problems, and make contact with consultants from the college faculty. Projects have ranged from 1-day meetings to 2-year programs. This report lists projects on which the center provided direct assistance to 15 districts and others on which the center cooperated with other educational organizations to sponsor activities jointly benefiting several districts. The paper also describes the center's efforts to inform the educational community of its services, including publications, personal contacts, the mass media, and liaisons with state educational agencies. The report also identifies five research projects that the center worked on in conjunction with public school districts. (PGD)

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THE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE:

COLLABORATION BETWEEN A UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

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THE CENTER FOR ACADEMIC EXCELLENCE: COLLABORATION BETWEEN A UNIVERSITY AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS

ABSTRACT

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The Center for Academic Excellence
The University of Central Arkansas

Historically, many Arkansas public schools have lacked the resources to provide effective staff development training; nor has there been money for consultant services for developing solutions to other professional problems incidental to administering a school or for developing valid evaluation procedures for personnel or programs. With some exceptions, the expertise of those in teacher and administrator training programs in the colleges and universities of Arkansas has been largely untapped primarily because there has been no formalized means to bring public schools in need of services in contact with university faculties who could provide the services. Little collaboration or cooperation existed until the Center for Academic Excellence was established by the College of Education of the University of Central Arkansas (UCA) in 1984 with the explicit purpose of improving education in Arkansas by cooperating and sharing university resources with the public schools.

Center staff, with written requests from district superintendents, work with schools to develop projects and programs designed to address locally identified needs. Over twenty districts have already responded with requests for help. The needs are diverse: There have been requests for training teachers in critical thinking skills; for general preschool workshop consultant services, for planning and implementing long term staff development programs, for addressing special problems of small rural schools, for evaluating secondary English programs, for devising high school computerized registration models, and for identifying components of and implementing quality secondary art programs.

Continual contact by Center staff with public schools is made through telephone calls to school personnel, a monthly newsletter which summarizes Center activities, visits to schools, and attendance and participation in local, state, and national meetings.

Research activities in the Center are conducted to serve the mutual needs of the university and the public schools. Evaluation consistent with the mission of the Center occurs through performance assessment of Center activities and personnel as well as documentation of services provided.

An implied impact may be discerned from the description of the Center activities reported here. This impact on public education in Arkansas will be great because of the unique design and organization of the Center. The most important impact of the Center results from promoting and fostering collaboration and cooperation between the College of Education and the public schools. As attention is given to the improvement of education, it is professionally recognized that there must be tangible evidence of cooperation and collaboration among the various levels of the educational enterprise.

INTRODUCTION

The Center for Academic Excellence was formed as the result of a proposal submitted in early 1984 to the Arkansas Department of Higher Education. Preliminary work began in mid-1984 and implementation of the project began in August 1984 with the appointment of a director. The goal of the Center is to improve education in Arkansas by cooperating and sharing the resources of The University of Central Arkansas College of Education with Arkansas public school districts in an effort to address fundamental educational problems.

Center staff provide the leadership in initiating on-site meetings with public school administrators in assessing local needs and devising plans for addressing problem areas. The faculty of The College of Education provide consultant services where needed. These professional services are available at no cost to the school districts. The goal as originally proposed has worked positively with good results. Modifications have been made in the variety and implementation of services to the public schools. The scope of projects has ranged from one-day discussions of minor problems to planning and implementation of programs requiring continuing support over a projected two-year period.

An assistant director for educational research and evaluation was employed in July 1985. The assistant director conducts special research and evaluates projects and programs identified by local school districts. In addition to the director and assistant director, the staff consists of one clerk and a graduate assistant.

SERVICES

For the purposes of this paper services are defined as (1) direct professional assistance to public school districts, that is, responses to requests from superintendents; and (2) collaboration with educational organizations to sponsor activities jointly benefiting a number of public school districts. The following examples are projects of the first type:

BIGELOW EAST END

Staff development needs survey and administration and evaluation of related activities.

Research into the Levelized Educational Advancement Program for elementary grade levels and subsequent submission of the report for publication.

DARDANELLE

Discussion with superintendent concerning action research projects and organization and operation of the Education Renewal Consortium/Goodlad School/University Partnership.

FORREST CITY

Development of a comprehensive staff development plan for teachers, support staff, administrators, and school board.

FORT SMITH

Administration inservice, assessment of computer assisted instruction program.

Research of homework policies from other districts to provide the basis for designing a local policy.

HAMBURG

Assessment of gifted and talented education program.

Development of a secondary departmentalization plan for English, social studies, science, and mathematics.

Plan for implementing "Writing Across the Curriculum" for high school.

HELENA-WEST HELENA

Evaluation of the high school English curriculum.

Application of computer capabilities for secondary student registration procedures.

HERMITAGE

Application of computer capabilities for secondary student registration procedures.

Possible participation in North Central Association accreditation process.

LAKE VILLAGE

Development of plan to train teachers to apply critical thinking skills in teaching and learning.

Evaluation of elementary media center.

LAMAR

Assistance in defining and organizing a staff development plan.

Development of a teacher evaluation process and instrument.

LITTLE ROCK

Design of research instrument to measure equity in educational programs and activities.

Higher education representation on a committee to develop plans for dropout intervention/prevention.

MCNEIL

Consultant services for administrative concerns.

MOUNTAIN PINE

Planning with superintendent-elect for teacher inservice.

Development of a secondary departmentalization plan.

PLAINVIEW-ROVER

Discussion with superintendent concerning educational standards, school organization, and administrative concerns.

PULASKI COUNTY

Advisory committee membership for inservice program for secondary principals.

SOUTH CONWAY COUNTY

Consultation and workshop presentations in personnel evaluation, reading, Program for Effective Teaching, implementation of course content lesson objectives.

The following are descriptions of the second (collaborative) type:

In cooperation with the Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative, an instructor from the UCA Art Department visited public schools to discuss with students, teachers, and administrators the components of a good art program. In addition the instructor provided on-site painting demonstrations for students and teachers. Workshops were scheduled in nine public school districts: Alread, Concord, Conway, Havanna, Leslie, Perry-Casa, Russellville, Stuttgart, and Wonderview. An estimated 250 students, teachers, and administrators were served.

The Center also collaborated with the College Board of Austin, Texas, to hold an Advanced Placement Conference at UCA for inservice training of public school teachers who were a part of the program. Approximately 250 teachers and administrators from 55 districts registered.

Other collaborative projects, sponsored by the Center and the Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative, included staff development planning workshops (31 participants, 20 districts); two elementary principals workshops (49 participants, 21 districts); two secondary school principals conferences (61 participants, 26 districts); and a Personnel Evaluation Criteria Conference/Breakfast held at UCA: (45 participants, 18 districts; and 15 participants, UCA).

The Director of the Arkansas Department of Education was invited, under Center auspices, to address the College of Education faculty. The Director discussed operations and services of the Department as well as educational programs and reforms in the school districts of Arkansas. In addition there was a question and answer session with the 40 college personnel in attendance.

The Center for Academic Excellence also participated in forming the Education Renewal Consortium. Funded by the Winthrop Rockefeller Foundation, the Consortium is comprised of the Bald Knob, Marianna, Sheridan, and Stuttgart public school districts and is developing strategies for effective school planning and follow-up. The Center has provided evaluation services in the form of evaluation planning, survey instruments, data entry and analysis, and report writing.

The number of participating school districts will be increased to nine and the consortium will become a part of a twelve state University/School Partnership Program designed by Dr. John Goodlad of the University of Washington. Funded by Exxon, Inc., the project envisions a sharing of education renewal activities among its members. In Arkansas, the University of Central Arkansas, the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville, and the nine public school districts will be represented. The Dean of The College of Education, the Director, and the Assistant Director of the Center will be among the participants.

OUTREACH

For the purposes of this paper outreach is defined as the efforts undertaken to make the educational community aware of the Center and its activities. This has been achieved in a number of ways.

In order to identify a core group of school districts, the Center director proposed a listing of 50 superintendents who would be invited to utilize the Center's resources. The school districts were located in an area from Fort Smith to Helena, and from Little Rock to Lake Village. The list contained names of superintendents who were known by the director, superintendents who had indicated an interest in the Center, and superintendents who had agreed to participate in the 10 regional teacher centers which were organized to assist in the College of Education's student teacher program. Approximately 30 per cent of this group responded by requesting assistance.

To maintain periodic contact with the superintendents and other administrators in the 50 school districts, the Center publishes and distributes NEWSBRIEFS, which is mailed to approximately 400 educators. Additionally, NEWSBRIEFS is distributed to 250 employees of the Arkansas Department of Education, and to 30 professionals within the University.

The Center has been fortunate to have statewide publicity through articles in the Arkansas Gazette and in the Arkansas Democrat. Locally, activities were reported in the Ashley County Ledger, and the Yell County Record. Articles have also appeared in the UCA Campus Contact, UCA Contact, and the Arkansas Department of Higher Education Review.

Personal contacts with other educators are regularly made at state and local meetings. Continuous contact with clients is also maintained through telephone messages. To date, approximately 450 calls have been placed to 40 public school personnel in Arkansas and to 40 other educational institutions and organizations around the county.

Business cards and a brochure succinctly describing the Center's mission, purpose, services, and staff are routinely distributed at meetings attended by the Center director and the assistant director.

Finally, close liaison is maintained with the director of the Arkansas Department of Education, with the executive director of the Arkansas Education Association, with the assistants for educational affairs in the Governor's office, with education service cooperatives, and with selected educators in institutions of higher education.

RESEARCH

For the purposes of this report research is defined as actual research projects and presentations done in conjunction with public school districts. Examples of these activities follow.

BIGELOW EAST END EVALUATION

The Center was asked to provide evaluation services to the East End School District to evaluate student attitudes, community and staff involvement, and administrative leadership. The Center provided the instruments, data analysis, and a report of the findings.

EDUCATION SERVICE COOPERATIVE SEMINAR ON STAFF DEVELOPMENT

The Assistant Director of the Arch Ford Education Service Cooperative invited the Center to participate in a series of staff development seminars presented to teachers, principals, and superintendents from districts represented in the Arch Ford Cooperative. Center staff made presentations concerning the evaluation component of the staff development plans required by the new state standards.

The Center also provided a presentation on program evaluation to superintendents, principals, and teachers during the Arch Ford Cooperative's staff development activities in Morrilton.

SURVEY OF 1983-1985 TEACHER EDUCATION PROGRAM GRADUATES

Childhood, Secondary, and Special Education program graduates from 1983-1985 were surveyed to determine how well they felt their classes had accomplished the stated goals of these programs. In all cases the teachers responded with favorable ratios. Comments about student teaching were also favorable. Those responding tended to strongly support twelve hours of student teaching as opposed to six hours.

SUSPENSION SCHOOL

The Center researched the Forrest City Suspension School program and participated with program administrators in a regional presentation of it. In addition, the report of the program was submitted and accepted for publication in ERIC's Resources in Education.

TRI-DISTRICT COUNCIL EVALUATION

The Center provided evaluation services to the Tri-District Council Conference on the Education of Black Children in Pulaski County Public Schools in Little Rock. The Center provided survey instruments, data analysis, and a report of the results.